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NRO REVIEW COMPLETED

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12 JUN 1963

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MEMORANDUM FOR : Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Review of Project TAGBOARD

1. The attached paper discusses in detail the background for Project TAGBOARD and the various steps leading up to the directive issued by D/NRO on 4 June 1963 removing CIA from the management and technical monitoring role which had been delegated to it by the previous D/NRO on 17 October 1962.

2. Also stated are some of our reasons for earnestly suggesting that the Director attempt to reverse Dr. McMillan's decision of 4 June, perhaps as a part of his immediate concern over the future of CIA in the clandestine reconnaissance field and his present attention to the entire NRO/USAF/CIA interface on U. S. reconnaissance policy. Little or no technical information has been included in this report, since it was felt that the basic problem was one of management rather than aerodynamics and technical operation.

3. In spite of the 4 June directive from D/NRO, and until resolution of the broader questions involved, the DD/R will continue to function in the management and technical monitoring role forecast in Dr. Charyk's paper of 17 October 1962.

Signed Herbert Scoville, Jr.

HERBERT SCOVILLE, JR.  
Deputy Director  
(Research)

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Signature Recommended:

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12 JUN 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR : Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH : Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Review of Development and Status of Project TAGBOARD

REFERENCE : a. Memo from D/NRO to DD/NRO; D/NRO Staff;  
D/Program D, Dated 4 June 1963; No Subject

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b. Memo from DD/R to D/NRO, Dated 6 June 1963;  
Subject: "Project TAGBOARD" NRO

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1. This memorandum is for the information of the Director of Central Intelligence and is not, therefore, an action paper.

2. Project TAGBOARD, the supersonic reconnaissance drone version of the A-12 OXCART aircraft, had its origin early in 1962 with a conversation between Dr. Eugene Fubini of the Office of Research and Engineering, Department of Defense, and Mr. C. L. Johnson, Vice President of Lockheed Aircraft Corporation and designer of the OXCART vehicle. Dr. Fubini asked Mr. Johnson if it would be possible to develop a small-scale version of the A-12 aircraft, which could be droned carrying a responsible reconnaissance payload with performance characteristics similar to that anticipated for the A-12. Dr. Fubini felt that such a drone version, if feasible and susceptible of development on the same time scale as the OXCART Program, would afford the President a choice between reconnaissance of critical denied areas with manned or unmanned aircraft. Dr. Fubini's concern was grounded in the U-2 incident of 1 May 1960 and the international repercussions of that act centering around the existence of a live pilot whose story proved certainly more politically damaging than the same mission would have provoked had the U-2 been operated at that time as a drone aircraft.

3. Mr. Johnson's response to Dr. Fubini was that he felt it would be feasible to develop a scaled-down version of the A-12, which could be launched from the basic OXCART vehicle on a time scale which would be compatible with the development of the larger aircraft. On 26 September 1962 the then Director of the National Reconnaissance Office, Dr. Joseph B. Charyk, in a memorandum

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to the Secretary of Defense stated that the projected drone now known as Project TAGBOARD "appears to offer an alternate means to the A-12 and satellite systems for the purpose of overflight photography [redacted]

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[redacted] From the tone of his memorandum, it appears that Dr. Charyk was not completely sold on the political advantages inherent in an AQ-12 as opposed to the manned version of the same aircraft. He said, "It seems to me that the drone would provide no better overflight capability than the A-12 will provide and, from my assessment, the political considerations in sending a drone on this type of mission are not significantly different from the political considerations in manned overflight." Dr. Charyk did state that he felt that the scaled-down version of the A-12 would result in a radar cross-section of equally reduced magnitude, making tracking of the drone more difficult than tracking the A-12. The principal attraction of the AQ-12 version to Dr. Charyk appears to be contained in his statement from the same memorandum of 26 September; "It (AQ-12) may . . . possess unique capabilities which are not possible with . . . other systems, [redacted]

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[redacted] At no time was the suggestion made that the AQ-12 should be considered as an offensive weapons system with a bomb carrying capability, although later utterances of the D/NRO have included statements to this effect.

4. As a follow-up to Dr. Charyk's memorandum of 26 September to the Secretary of Defense, and after a meeting between Mr. McNamara and the DCI on 5 October, it was agreed to proceed with initial stages of the development of the AQ-12 program. In view of technical uncertainties of the system, it was agreed that the program would be carefully reviewed after an initial study and feasibility phase had been completed. Following the meeting between the Secretary of Defense and the DCI on 5 October, Dr. Charyk agreed with Dr. Scoville that management responsibility for Project TAGBOARD should be in CIA in much the same way as the OXCART Project. He also agreed that DOD should assign an individual to CIA knowledgeable on drones and enthusiastic for the AQ-12 program. On 11 October 1962 the Assistant Director, Office of Special Activities, requested the NRO Comptroller [redacted] to cover the feasibility study project which Mr. Johnson of Lockheed proposed in writing to AD/OSA on 9 October 1962. A terminal date of 2 January 1963 was set for completion of this part of the TAGBOARD Project.

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5. On 17 October 1962 Dr. Charyk, in a memorandum to the DD/R, stated in part; "NRO management responsibility for this development is assigned

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to the Director, Program B (AD/OSA). " In the same memorandum Dr. Charyk stated that he was prepared to assign Lt. Colonel Henry Howard from the NRO Staff to the Director, Program B, "for this important task". On 26 October 1962, the DD/R responded to Dr. Charyk's memorandum of 17 October, stating that "Colonel Jack C. Ledford, USAF, Director, Program B, has assumed managerial responsibility for the AQ-12 drone project". My memorandum of this date also expressed appreciation for the nomination of Lt. Colonel Howard and further asked that communications be established between Colonel Ledford and Lt. Colonel Howard in order to determine when the latter would assume his new position. Nothing further was heard from the NRO Staff on Colonel Howard's nomination to this Agency.

6. In the interim between 26 October 1962 and the completion of Lockheed's feasibility study for Project TAGBOARD on 11 January 1963, OSA solicited camera proposals for the AQ-12 reconnaissance system for interested manufacturers, and on 3 December 1962, firm proposals were received from Eastman-Kodak, Perkin-Elmer Corporation, ITEK Corporation and HYCON Manufacturing Company. The TAGBOARD feasibility study was optimistic, and following a meeting between the Secretary of Defense and the DCI, approval to proceed with the program on the basis of recommendations from the D/NRO and the DD/R-CIA was given. On 28 February 1963, Lockheed was given a go-ahead for the procurement of twenty drones and modification of two A-12 into drone launch aircraft configurations. Lockheed at that time forecast that the first AQ-12 drone would be ready for flight test within approximately fifteen months. Delivery of cameras was deemed compatible with this schedule.

7. Subsequent to Dr. Charyk's 17 October 1962 memorandum assigning management responsibilities for TAGBOARD to CIA, there was no formal exchange with the D/NRO on this subject up to the time of his departure from the Department of Defense. However, rumors began reaching the Office of Special Activities after Dr. Charyk's departure to the effect that the question of management and technical responsibility had in fact not been clearly settled. These rumors were definitely directed toward establishing the proposition that the USAF should be responsible for technical operation and later operational missions in view of their historical experience in the operation of drone aircraft. In the meantime OSA continued to exercise its management responsibility in the fields of contracts, security and technical monitoring as provided for in the 17 October 1962 paper from Dr. Charyk. During the early tenure of Dr. McMillan, the question of TAGBOARD responsibility was raised, and he indicated that he had been advised that this more appropriately belonged in the AF than in CIA. I demurred and pointed out that in view of the close association with the A-12 and the strong requirement for covertness for this project, I did not feel this appropriate. On 25 April Dr. McMillan forwarded me a draft memorandum assigning TAGBOARD to Director, Program D and asked for my concurrence.

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I demurred even more strongly and asked for the logic which would justify such a decision. Dr. McMillan then stated that one of the strong requirements for this development was for military activities such as bomb delivery in wartime, and he also repeated his previous arguments that CIA had not been enthusiastic about the usefulness of the project and therefore was not appropriate as manager. I stated that the idea of the drone as a bomb carrier had never been seriously proposed and could not be a serious consideration in this connection. I further pointed out that CIA's record in pressing for the feasibility study and pushing for improved capabilities in face of Dr. Charyk's opposition belied the statement that CIA would not pursue the program vigorously.

8. In order to force this issue into the open, a message was sent on 4 June 1963 to Lockheed and HYCON, with an information copy to the Director of Program D, NRO, convening the first of a series of periodic TAGBOARD status reviews and co-ordination meetings. The call for these meetings went out in the name of CIA, with the further suggestion that Lockheed obtain representation from the Ramjet engine manufacturer and guidance systems' contractor. The afternoon of the same day, 4 June, Dr. McMillan, Director, National Reconnaissance Office, signed a memorandum to DD/R, the Director NRO Staff, and the Director of Program D, assigning Project TAGBOARD to Colonel Leo P. Geary, USAF, Director of Program D and calling out the conditions which were to be in effect. (See Reference a.) It is interesting to observe that the D/NRO in the first of the conditions set forth lays upon the Director of Program D the responsibility for conducting Project TAGBOARD as a "completely black activity". In a brief note accompanying the referenced memorandum, Dr. McMillan said that the overriding consideration in assigning TAGBOARD to USAF in his opinion "is that this program is of vital interest to the military and ... will have a direct application to systems under direct military control". On 6 June 1963 I said that I felt this matter should be referred upward to the Secretary of Defense and DCI for a policy decision and asked that the D/NRO not implement his directive of 4 June until such a policy decision was in hand. In the meantime Lockheed has agreed to an initial one-day technical review of TAGBOARD to be held in Burbank on 19 June 1963.

9. It is obvious from the detailed chronicle above that the various responsibilities for Project TAGBOARD have suffered from a certain amount of fuzzy interpretation. Attempts by the DD/R and members of the Office of Special Activities to force a restatement of responsibilities from the NRO Staff were met with coolness from the beginning, and especially after the departure

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of Dr. Charyk from the job of D/NRO. We feel that the assignment of TAGBOARD to Air Force is fundamentally incorrect for a variety of reasons, some of which are set forth hereafter, though not necessarily in order of importance.

a. There is a basic problem of dual responsibility for the ultimate operation of TAGBOARD if the Project gravitates to USAF. The Agency maintains operational control of Project OXCART, whose vehicles will be used to launch the TAGBOARD drone. To superimpose another level of operations control on OXCART from the same base is detrimental to the efficiency.

b. It is our view that security on TAGBOARD would be impaired by the close relationship of that Project to the R-12 (Project EARNING), with both aircraft being produced in the same physical facility and technically monitored by personnel from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. It is our view under these circumstances that a truly covert program cannot exist, and ultimately TAGBOARD would become simply another part of a much broader USAF program in a KEDLOCK/ context.

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c. Project TAGBOARD, under USAF technical management, would superimpose another layer of technical management on Lockheed and would further dilute Mr. Johnson's efforts to bring Project OXCART to operational readiness.

d. Should a decision be made to surface the long range interceptor version of the A-12, Project TAGBOARD might well turn out to be the most covert asset of the whole OXCART Program. It is our view that for the reasons noted above, Project TAGBOARD cannot remain covert for very long if subjected to normal USAF management and operational techniques.

e. As for a reported bomb-carrying military mission for the AQ-12 suggested orally by D/NRO to DD/R as one reason for retaining TAGBOARD control in Air Force, it should be noted that the bomb-carrying capability of the AQ-12 would be drastically limited to no more than 250 pounds. It is our view that such a limitation prevents serious consideration for this aircraft as an

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offensive weapons system, since it offers little in this configuration not available to the military at the end of World War II in the German V-2 rocket.

10. Obviously a solution to the present muddle over responsibility for Project TAGBOARD is only one part of the larger problem of CIA's role in the clandestine reconnaissance business. It is, however, illustrative of the divergence of opinion existing as a hard cold fact between certain elements of the Air Force and those parts of CIA charged with the responsibility historically for the conduct of these clandestine reconnaissance operations.

Signed Herbert Scoville, Jr.

HERBERT SCOVILLE, JR.  
Deputy Director  
(Research)

Signature Recommended:

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DAD/OSA:JACunningham, Jr. (10 June 63)

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